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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002111

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS, DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: KARZAI TO VISIT INDIA, TO BE GREETED WITH OPEN ARMS

REF: NEW DELHI 2047

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Within weeks of the July 7 suicide attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul, Afghan President Hamid Karzai will visit New Delhi August 3-5. According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Karzai will meet with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, President Pratibha Patil, Vice President Hamid Ansari, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani during his visit to re-affirm bilateral security and political commitments and finalize Indian development projects in Afghanistan. Karzai's trip follows weeks of mounting suspicion of Pakistan ISI-sponsored terrorism in the region, culminating in critical press statements by Indian National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan alleging Pakistan complicity in the Kabul attack. Amidst rising tension in the Indo-Pakistan relationship, Karzai's visit represents a confirmation of solid Afghanistan-India bilateral relations and India's long-term commitment and engagement in the country. End Summary.

According to MEA, Indo-Afghan Relations Strengthening

12. (SBU) According to Foreign Ministry contacts, Afghan President Karzai will visit New Delhi on August 3-5. MEA Under Secretary for Afghan Affairs Ghotu Ram Meena told Poloff July 31 that Karzai would meet with the Prime Minister, President Pratibha Patil, Vice President Hamid Ansari, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani. Meena added that Karzai and India officials will discuss joint initiatives to face pressing political and security challenges, including the on-going violence in Kabul, terrorist resurgence in India and rising tensions in between both countries and Pakistan. The visit represents a deepening of ties between Afghanistan and India, Meena said, following weeks of heavily publicized allegations of Pakistan-backed terrorist infiltration in both countries.

Counter-terrorism, Prevailing Issue

13. (SBU) Meena indicated that Karzai's visit comes at a "difficult time" for India, following a string of terrorist attacks. The regional terrorist threat, and defusing Islamic extremist networks, would be the prevailing topic for discussion, he said, pointing to the July 7 suicide attack on the Indian Embassy as a "turning point" in the Afghan-Indian relationship that underscored the "critical importance" of bilateral counter-terrorism agendas. He echoed critical press statements by Indian officials and President Karzai, alleging Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency's involvement in the attack (Ref A) and stressed continued "strain" on the India-Pakistan relationship.

14. (C) Executive Director of the South Asia Terrorism Portal Ajai Sahni noted that "escalating rhetoric" alleging Pakistan complicity in regional terrorist activity is not surprising. He observed that Indian and Afghan intelligence consistently point to ISI involvement in regional terrorist attacks, stating, "terrorism is the product of the ISI." Sahni further explained that the Jaipur bombing in May 2008 and July terrorist attacks in Gujarat and Bangalore indicate an "alarming change in tactics" for ISI-sponsored networks, noting the spread of "soft target" attacks throughout the country, similar to on-going violence reported in the Kashmir Valley. In regards to specific outcomes from Karzai's visit, Sahni expected the "usual rhetoric" praising bilateral counter-terrorism and development efforts and noted that the diplomatic relationship was "as good as it can get."

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Development in Afghanistan Critical to Regional Stability

15. (SBU) Meena explained that since 2001, India effectively engaged with Karzai's government, noting Afghanistan's strategic importance for "security and stability" in the region. As proof of this engagement, he cited Indian government-funded capacity-building projects such as roads, schools, and hospitals. Meena highlighted the Indian government-financed Zaranj-Delaram road in Afghanistan, which will provide direct access to the Iranian Chahbahar Port and enhance Afghanistan's regional trade capacity. He speculated that External Affairs Minister Mukherjee will travel to Kabul within the next month to formally inaugurate the road and meet with counterparts. Sahni further noted that Afghanistan has relied on one main supply route through Pakistan until now. The Zaranj-Delaram road will provide an alternative supply route and has the potential to "significantly alter" economic development throughout the region.

Comment: Capstone to an Eventful Month

16. (C) The month of July underscored the volatile political and security environment in India and throughout the region. The July 7 suicide attack in Kabul and subsequent terrorist incidents in Gujarat and Bangalore, in addition to reported Pakistani violations across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, reinforced the Government of India's tenuous security concerns. Karzai's visit is seen here as a symbolic effort on part of the Afghan government to highlight on-going bilateral cooperation with India. Given recent developments, Post expects Karzai will find a warm welcome in Delhi, to be greeted with a willingness from India to consider almost any form of assistance Karzai may seek. End Comment.

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